DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 421 HE 014 336

AUTHOR McAninch, Christopher
TITLE Linking Architecture and History in the Teaching of Undergraduates: A Three Course Sequence.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Architectural Character; *Architectural Education; Art History; *Building Design; Course Descriptions; *Cultural Influences; Curriculum Design; Field Instruction; Higher Education; Home Furnishings; Housing; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Introductory Courses; *Nineteenth Century Literature; North American Culture; Popular Culture; Preservation; Social History; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS *Hiram College OH

ABSTRACT

The architecture sequence at Hiram College, Ohio, which consists of three courses and supervised volunteer work at restoration sites in the region, is described. The sequence links American architecture and the broader areas of cultural history and literature, and the courses are open to any student in the college. The introductory course examines the simultaneous emergence of an American culture and an American architecture in early 19th-century America and is based on viewing the house as a symbolic mode as perceived through contemporary literature. Students analyze literature to help understand the forces that formed domestic architecture, including popular attitudes and tastes. The third course deals with American cultural life from 1890 to the present, with special emphasis on architecture. The meaning of artifacts and the way that public taste of Americans, as shown in the structured forms of their living and working space, reflects basic cultural values are addressed. This course examines the rapidly changing architecture and material culture of the industrial ages, uses visual aids to demonstrate associations between varying art forms, and examines regional architecture via slides and sight visitations. Details of the development of the architecture sequence and financial support of the program are indicated. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED207421

HE

LINKING ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORY IN THE TEACHING OF UNDERGRADUATES: A THREE COURSE SEQUENCE

A Report by Christopher McAnirch

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Reynold Stucker
Dept. Head Callen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

HE 014 336

The architecture sequence at Hiram College consists of three separate courses taught by three separate professors and includes supervised volunteer work at various restoration sites in the region. It engages the full breadth of American architecture beginning with the simple domestic dwellings of the earliest non-native inhabitants and concluding with the entangling question of present day society and the appropriateness of her architecture.

Although some students take all three courses, the sequence is also designed so that each of the courses is independent and that, for instance, students interested in art and literature of the nineteenth century can take the middle course in the sequence while other students, mainly interested in European art or history, might find the first course more interesting and relevant. The three courses taken together count towards a major in history; the middle course counts also for students toward an English major. None of the courses has a prerequisite. They are all open to any student in the college.

The architecture sequence capitalizes on the strengths of the faculty. It also capitalizes on Hiram's strength as an institution. Rather than having knowledge subdivided and parcelled out in discrete and sharply differentiated forms, Hiram has consciously striven to provide integrated approaches. One of the basic principles of the sequence is that Hiram's liberal arts students benefit most from courses on American architecture if they are well grounded in the broader sweep of cultural history and literature; thus the training of the three professors in literature and American history is essential to the program. An additional rationale for the program has been that all too often architecture and material culture are divorced from the concerns of conventional scholars of American cultural

history so that to some extent all three professors are expanding their definitions of culture beyond the boundaries which existed when they were receiving much of their training. It has been stated that one of the great virtues of the architectural sequence is that it provides for an interplay between the analytical mode of the historian and the aesthetic sensitivity of the art critic, and that normally the particular barriers between these approaches remain unbreached.

History of the Program:

The first steps toward a program in architectural history and preservation were taken in the fall of 1976; student response was so favorable that the program developed rapidly. A year of experimentation led to the conclusion by the faculty and the administration that the college was ready to launch a full-scale program, at least on a trial basis.

In the fall of 1976 the history department met with Richard Berg, the director of the Geauga County Historical Society and the manager of the Historical Society's historic village at Burton, Ohio, which is nine miles north of Hiram. The historic village is composed of sixteen nineteenth-century buildings, all but two of which have been moved to their present location. Two of the more distinguished buildings were only partially restored, completely unfurnished and not open to the public. A third building had been less restored than remodelled. It was decided that it would be beneficial for both parties if students would help provide manual labor in the work going on in restoration. In the winter of 1976 a group of five students were selected from sixteen who volunteered to work an afternoon a week at the Society's village. These students were given a single room in the remodelled house, invited to do the research for a restoration, and then actually to begin the work. They ended up restoring the room and furnishing it

appropriate to the period of the house and to the size and status of the house's original occupants.

In the spring of 1977, Professor Kimon Giocarinis, a historian of the culture of Europe in the Middle Ages, as well as a student of the History of architecture and the architecture of the Hiram area, agreed to offer students the chance to continue their work at Burton, but this time for academic credit on an independent study basis. He informally taught a group of a dozen students an introductory course on the history of architecture; at the same time he supervised the students in researching the oldest and most distinguished house in Burton. The students began drafting a restoration plan, not altogether unlike that done for Fort Johnson. Two of the students became so enthusiastic and proved so helpful that they joined the staff of the Historical Society for the summer.

The next steps were taken during the summer of 1977 when Professor David Anderson of the English department and Professor Giocarinis collaborated on a summer school course that reviewed much of the history of American architecture in conjunction with the reading and discussion of several notable works in American literature in which architecture provides a central motif. The course served to allow Professor Anderson to develop his ideas on how the aesthetic principles used in evaluating literature could be used to provide a basis for introducing students to the task of evaluating architecture. It also confirmed his belief that literary works dealing with architecture provide a valuable means for getting at the general cultural assumptions behind a given architectural style.

In the fall of 1977 a new course approved by the faculty, History 260, The Architecture of the Western Reserve: What It Is and How To Save It, was offered to a group of fifteen students by an American historian, Professor

John Strassburger. The course was designed to cover the history of architecture in America from 1607 through the 1840's. The course set pre-1800 architecture in the context of Anglo-American culture more generally. In keeping with almost all the recent scholarship on colonial architecture, the course emphasized that colonial buildings reflected the provincial status of their builders and that a truly American or independent mode of building did not arise until the first quarter of the nineteenth century, with the beginning of the Greek Revival. Then the course examined in some detail the more notable Greek Revival buildings and some of the better preserved early nineteenth-century villages in the area.

In the spring of 1977, Hiram College was awarded a Pilot grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities to further pursue the work it had begun on the architectural history program. The two courses that had been taught by Messrs. Strassburger and Anderson were refined and a third course was added by Professor Michael Starr, an American cultural historian of wide-ranging interests. He developed a course in recent American history that focused on the evolution of modern American architecture as an expression of material culture. In addition, the restoration fieldwork was further developed to include work on two different buildings at the Burton Historical village.

The monies received from the NEH also made it possible to enhance the library's collection of materials on architecture. Since that time, the library has purchased and cataloged over 450 books dealing with Historic Preservation, architectural history, and cultural material.

At an early stage, it was realized the extent to which visual materials were essential in teaching the sequence. The slide collection now includes more than 800 slides of regional and national architecture. Both the library and slide collections continue to grow and to provide the resources so vital

to successful academic pursuits.

The Specific Courses:

The introductory course, The Architecture of the Western Reserve: What It Is and How To Save It, has developed as its theme the idea that manmade environments reflect the essence of the age and serve as the vocabulary of social expression. Also, that the act of constructing an environment can itself shape the evolution of subsequent values, can amount to the construction of the grammar for subsequent social expression. More particularly, the introductory course aims at a description and an explanation of the simultaneous emergence of an American culture and an American architecture in early nineteenth-century America. It introduces students to architecture, to real buildings, and to the vocabulary of architecture in a course covering the history of American architecture and culture through the period of the early development of the Western Reserve region.

The course begins with the investigation of the relationship between architecture and culture. Pre-European North American woodland architecture and culture is compared with the buildings and societies created by the early English immigrants. Because in the seventeenth century there was both a tendency to leave structural elements exposed and an irresistable temptation for colonizers to draw up elaborate plans for projected communities, the introductory unit provides a suitable place for considering some principles of construction and some ruminations on the ways relationships between buildings can be as important as the individual designs. As a laboratory in studying principles of construction students examine carefully the oldest home in the possession of the Geauga County Historical Society built in the fall of 1819. The class also tours Mesopotamia, Ohio, which has been designated a National Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places because it is

virtually unchanged from its early days. The remarkable feature of this town is that in its arrangement of buildings and fields it echoes the kind of villages first established in colonial New England.

The second portion of the course begins with a primer on the components of style in both furnishings and architecture. The components of style are followed as they evolve in the eighteenth century from William and Mary and Queen Anne to Georgian-Chippendale and Adamesque-Federal. This unit, in addition to describing these styles, sets out carefully the circumstantial evidence pointing toward the conclusion that changes in taste are expressions of the most significant human currents.

The course continues as it covers the emergence of Greek Revival architecture and furniture during the first flowering of de Tocqueville's undeferential America. There are visits to other houses, such as Shandy Hall and those at the Western Reserve Historical Society's Hale Farm and Village. Slides of other similar houses are shown. This portion of the course deals with two separate questions, the first of which is how we know or learn about a building through public records, physical research such as paint research, and, insofar as possible, private documents. The second question is, once all the known or probable "facts" pertaining to a house are established, how close can we come to accounting for its form, even its beauty. Supporting materials pertaining to the evolving Greek Revival Style more generally come from a style book of Asher Benjamin.

The course concludes with an introduction to the preservation movement by briefly describing its history, philosophies and guidelines, and finally, by demonstrating how it has, and is profoundly affecting our regional architecture. We would someday like to expand these themes into an entire course.

The second course, Moods and Attitudes in Nineteenth Century America,

presents a different approach to the problem of developing awareness and sensitivity to the problems of nineteenth-century architecture. The course takes up chronologically where the previous course leaves off, with the late flowering of the Greek Revival, dealing with the growing eclecticism associated with Gothic Revival and its more exotically related movements of Egyptianism and Orientalism.

The focus of the entire program is on the need for students to work with material shifts in this particular course from the study of an actual house to the study of other kinds of primary source materials which are pertinent in developing heightened awareness of the pressures that form taste. The viewpoint of the literary historian and critic is brought to bear on the house as a symbolic mode as perceived through contemporary literature. By studying the novels and notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the ironic observations of Henry David Thoreau, and the thoroughgoing realism of William Dean Howells -- all of whom were interested historically as well as fictionally in architecture -- refine the students' sense of the forces at work that formed domestic architecture.

At the same time that the student is learning to apply a literary critical methodology to the symbolic mode of fiction, he is directed to an examination of a rich store of popular literature of the day. Close scrutiny of localized popular literature conveys a sense of what things were actually, rather than theoretically available to the builder and inhabitant of a nineteenth century dwelling. As important as this, is the application of a literary sensibility (gained through the study of the fiction in the course) to determine and weigh popular attitude toward the choices in taste and judgement that people were faced with.

The student is faced with problems that are different from those he

might encounter using a strictly historical perspective. Working with a faculty member trained in the aesthetic dimension of literature as a symbolic mode, forced even to make and defend aesthetic value judgements, helps to redefine the multidimensional ways in which the problems of the architectural history must be faced. Students work with primary source materials much of the time in the course, but they are asked to view these from unfamiliar perspectives. By applying the literary method, they are asked, as Edgar Allen Poe asked, to determine the "under or mystic current of its meaning."

A close collaboration, then, between literary materials -- novels and other writing of popular nineteenth-century literary figures -- and materials of popular culture bring the strictly historical perspective of the budding preservationist into a new focus.

The third course, Architecture and American Culture in the Twentieth Century, deals with American cultural life from 1890 to the present with specific emphasis upon architecture; it traces the breakdown of the moral certainty and confidence of Victorian world-view and the search for new values and forms of community in the twentieth century. It examines the architectural ideas and products of Americans from the precious gingerbread of the late Victorian era to the modernist structures of the present. The purpose of the course is to seek to determine the meaning such artifacts had to the people who produced them and consumed them, and furthermore, to find out how the public taste of Americans, as implicated in the structured forms of their living and working space, reflects the most basic values of the culture.

Literary allusions and even politics played important roles in determining the direction of nineteenth-century architectural designs and furnishings; taste in the period was weighted with moral as well as aesthetic implications. The popularity of Greek Revival designs, for example, was based, in

part, on the American sympathy with the cause of Greek independence from Turkey, fused with a veneration for Athenian democracy. Like-wise the last quarter of the nineteenth century recalled the traditional American belief in the dignity of manual labor by championing furniture fashioned from "native wood" with visible evidence of construction.

Such uses of style, combined with the traditional flow of European influence that continued to affect taste contributed to a wave of eclecticism in design motifs. The renewed interest in the Beaux Arts School in Paris along with the 1893 Chicago World's Fair emphasized historical and borrowed styles. For example, the Woolworth building erected in New York in 1919 by Cass Gilbert utilized a medieval vocabulary of gargoyles and intricate tracery to create a Gothic skyscraper, often called the Cathedral of Commerce. The eclecticism provides the occasion for examining the community of the arts as it existed in the early twentieth century, and the way in which one art form made use of the motifs of the others.

The course closely examines this community of arts in the Art Deco movement that spans both the refined arts and popular culture in the 1920's and 1930's. In many ways Art Deco artists sought to create and establish an art expressive of their time. This meant incorporating industrial motifs which conveyed the idea of speed, motion, and intensity. The machine became the inspiration for many artists and influenced the rectilinear style that typified Art Deco. American architects like Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright attempted to integrate furniture and decorative objects into their architectural movement. The style spread from places like the set designs for the Ballet Russe, to modern architecture and furniture design, to the film sets of Erte, as various art forms sought to update and modernize their work in line with the spreading ethos of the machine age.

And thus, by the approach of a cultural historian, this course examines carefully the rapidly changing architecture and material culture of the industrial ages. It relies heavily on visual aids to demonstrate exactly how the association between varying art forms can be made. Hence, the slide collection includes not only exhaustive documentation of the architecture of the Art Deco movement, but also extensive examples of the period's flourishing material culture -- jewelry, furniture, and automobiles to name but a few.

The course makes extensive use of the regional architecture via slides and sight visitations. A trip to Cleveland, for instance, provides innumerable examples of the rich architectural trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a class, we tour the high rises of the city's revitalized Public Square. In addition, the students go to the Cleveland Arcade, a dramatic Richardsonian structure built in 1890.

During the course the class also visits Lakeland cemetary and the tomb of James A. Garfield. This extravagant mausoleum epitomized Late Victorian monumentalism. Later in the course the class travels to Bear Run, Pennsylvania to see Fallingwater, an example of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie School architecture.

In addition to these three courses, those students interested in indulging in the actual business of restoration are able to do so at various local restoration sites. Currently, for instance, students are doing the preliminary groundwork for the restoration of a nineteenth-century Greek Revival school house in Everett, Ohio, a town owned by, and within the environs of, the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area. For this work the students receive one hour of credit under Hiram's activity unit program which requires every student to do volunteer work of one kind or another. Thus even after students have completed courses, they can remain involved.

Results of the Architecture Sequence:

Recently Hiram College was awarded a $260,000 Implementation grant from the NEH to expand upon the notion underlying this sequence; that is, that we can utilize the region to test and exemplify in a specfic and tangible way the general abstract propositions of the humanities.

The project approved by the NEH will add 11 new courses and revise some 20 more throughout the college curriculum over the next three and a half years. Within each of these courses will be sections focusing upon events and materials of the region. It is expected that this untraditional use of regionalism will gain for students, as it has in the architectural sequence, a better understanding of basic concepts in the humanities as well as enriching their understanding of their region. One of the reviewers of the proposal speculates that the project has "potential national significance as a model."

Conclusion:

In the Fall of 1979, Dr. Walter Edgar, Assistant Chairman of the Department of History at the University of South Carolina and outside evaluator of the Architectural Sequence of Hiram, described the program as follows:

> The Architecture and Historic Preservation sequence at Hiram achieved its academic objectives in a splendid fashion. It is academically challenging and innovative . . . the future for the sequence is bright.

At that time, no one at Hiram College realized just how bright the future would be.

The architectural sequence at Hiram College has been successful beyond all expectations. Each course is now offered once a year and the activity unit once each quarter. Enrollments in all the courses continue to grow larger and more diverse. As a result of this exposure, several Hiram students

have gone on to graduate programs in Historic Preservation and archival work. For these reasons and more, the architectural sequence has firmly implanted itself into the Hiram curriculum.

For more information contact: Center for Regional Studies
Hiram College
Hiram, OH 44234